



NATIONAL HEALTH CARE SURVEY

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM?

The organization and financing of America's health care system have a profound effect on health care delivery and the ways patients access and receive health services. Data on differences in health care practices and its causes are critical for evaluating issues such as quality of care and appropriate use of clinical services, diffusion of new technologies and clinical information, and medical error. An understanding of how patients enter the health care system is needed to shed light on health care disparities and the ability of the system to provide services to the most vulnerable populations through an effective health care safety net.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

The National Health Care Survey (NHCS) is a family of surveys that collects data from health care establishments about the utilization of services across the major sectors of the U.S. health care system. These data may be used to profile changes in the use of health care resources, patterns of disease, and the impact of new medications and technologies. Information on the characteristics of providers, facilities, and patients allows researchers to study shifts in the delivery of care across the health care system, variations in treatment patterns, and patient outcomes.

Examples of program in action:

- Data show the average waiting time in Emergency Departments for non-urgent visits has increased from 51 minutes in 1997 to 68 in 2000.
- Data from the NHCS show that the antibiotic prescribing rate has decreased from 838 per 1,000 children in 1989-1990 to 503 in 1999-2000.
- Since the early 1980s there has been an increase in the use of antibiotics that coincides with a rise in antibiotic resistance. This in turn lead public health officials to place priority on educating providers and patients about more appropriate use of antibiotics. The data show the effectiveness of the campaign among office-based physicians treating children aged 15 and younger.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

- Expand the sample sizes in the various surveys to more accurately monitor disparities in health care among priority populations such as racial and ethnic minorities, women, rural communities and children.
- Increase the usefulness of provider-based data to monitor and assess quality of care by providing national benchmark data for comparison with state and local performance. Data collection forms and sampling frames can be adapted to address quality of care issues and information can be linked to data on provider characteristics.

For more information on this and other CDC programs, visit www.cdc.gov/programs.

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